

VZCZCXRO0654
OO RUEHROV
DE RUEHJM #1794/01 2391009
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
O 271009Z AUG 07
FM AMCONSUL JERUSALEM
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 8820
INFO RUEHXK/ARAB ISRAELI COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RHEHNSC/WHITE HOUSE NSC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 JERUSALEM 001794

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

NEA FOR FRONT OFFICE, NSC FOR ABRAMS/SINGH/WATERS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/27/2017

TAGS: PGOV KWBG EAID PTER KDEM PREL

SUBJECT: GAZA CITY MAYOR: HAMAS PROVIDING SECURITY BUT
BRUTALLY REPRESSING DISSENT; RESIDENTS' ECONOMIC OUTLOOK
BLEAK AND WORSENING

REF: JERUSALEM 1524

Classified By: Acting Principal Officer Tom Duffy, for reasons 1.4 (b)
and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary. Gaza City Mayor Majid Abu Ramadan (Independent, appointed by President Abbas in 2005) told PolOff August 20 that Hamas has effectively portrayed itself as a victim of hostile external policies and that most Gazans blame their suffering on Israel, the PA and the international community, not Hamas. Hamas' strong security regime provides personal security, Abu Ramadan said, "as long as you keep your mouth shut," but brutally reacts to political opposition. The Mayor said he faced down an attempt by Hamas activists to force him out, but is worried that municipal workers striking for nonpayment of salaries will justify a Hamas takeover of municipal services and then the city council. Observers agree the strike and lack of funds mean uncollected refuse throughout the city, continual electrical shortages and brownouts, public health threats and deteriorating infrastructure. End summary.

Gazans Blame Israel, PA, International Community, Not Hamas

¶2. (C) At an August 20 meeting in Jerusalem, Gaza City Mayor Majid Abu Ramadan told PolOff that Hamas has effectively portrayed itself as a victim of hostile Israeli and U.S. policies, and that most Gazans blame crossing closures, electrical shortages and poverty on Israel, the PA and the international community, not Hamas. He said residents' suffering helps Hamas to avoid accusations of incompetence. Externally-imposed restrictions in the context of the Israeli occupation allow Hamas to avoid blame for its errors, he said, and win sympathy as perceived resistance fighters and victims. He said Hamas is growing stronger because of the Israeli/international approach and is unlikely to collapse, while moderate Gazans with international connections are being choked.

Hamas Providing Effective Security,
"As Long as You Keep Your Mouth Shut"

¶3. (C) Hamas' strong security regime provides residents personal security, Abu Ramadan said, "as long as you keep your mouth shut." He said the streets are quiet and violent and property crime are down, but Hamas responds brutally to political demonstrations. He said all Fatah activists, including those associated with Muhammad Dahlan's rival Ahmad Hillis, are monitored and harassed by Hamas security officials and noted that Hamas is not strictly targeting those Fatah members who are allied with Dahlan or who fought Hamas. He noted that the Hamas Executive Force recently

detained the PA Attorney General, Ahmad al-Mughani, in an attempt to coerce his resignation.

¶4. (C) Abu Ramadan said PA officials in Gaza face a dilemma with the Executive Force: while most agree with President Abbas that it is an illegal organization, it is Gaza's only law enforcement organization, as long as the police and other PASF remain at home and refuse to work with deposed Hamas PM Ismayil Haniyah's administration. He said the Executive Force is highly responsive in responding to problems reported by PA/municipal leaders or Fatah officials, but reliance on the Executive Force for security implies recognition of its legitimacy and gives Hamas a propaganda victory.

Hamas Activists Try to Take Over Municipality, But Back Down

¶5. (C) Abu Ramadan said some 50-60 Hamas city employees led by Hatim Shaykh Khalil and accompanied by three gunmen gathered at the Municipality August 12 demanding Abu Ramadan and the city council resign. Abu Ramadan said he directed the municipal offices shut down and notified Gaza-based Fatah Central Committee (FCC) member Zakariya al-Agha and PA Minister of Local Government (MoLG) Ziad al-Bandak in Ramallah. He said he also called Sufian Abu Samra, an independent deputy to deposed Hamas MoLG Muhammad al-Barghuthi, who said the attempted takeover was Khalil's personal initiative, unsupported by Hamas leaders. He said municipal operations continue as normal, and neither Shaykh Khalil nor any gunmen or demonstrators have returned. He said Hamas could easily take over the municipality, but may realize the political cost it would entail.

JERUSALEM 00001794 002 OF 002

Multiple Crises as Muni Workers Strike for Unpaid Salaries and Poverty Worsens

¶6. (C) Municipal workers have not been paid salaries in nine months, and most are on strike, Abu Ramadan said. Trash is uncollected (Gaza City produces 600 tons of solid waste daily), and city infrastructure has deteriorated without maintenance or repairs. He said Hamas recently paid 2,000 of its members 50 shekels (about 12 dollars) to gather garbage and burn it on Gaza's two largest thoroughfares, but trash on major streets and in residential areas is piling up, causing horrible odors and attracting vermin.

¶7. (C) The PA Finance Ministry has ceased most tax revenue/vehicle fee sharing with Gaza City, Abu Ramadan said, but the main cause of the city's empty coffers is that residents cannot afford bills for essential services, leaving the city unable to pay its USD 1 million monthly salary bill. He said he worries the city's inability to provide basic services or pay employees will give Hamas a convenient excuse to dismiss the city council and appoint its own members. Abu Ramadan said the closure/bankruptcy of most of Gaza's manufacturing and agricultural businesses combined with non-payment of public sector employees has exacerbated poverty and prompts increased demands for food and medical assistance.

DUFFY